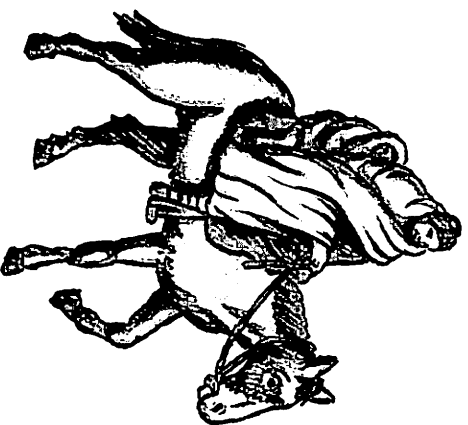


The Trail of Tears



What made the Trail of Tears such a tragic event in American history?

¹ It was a sad sight. Thousands of men, women, and children trudged across the land. Soldiers forced them on with gun butts. Many fell dead from hunger and cold. The Native American Cherokee people will never forget or forgive this Trail of Tears.

Quiet Lives

² The Cherokees once lived in the Great Smoky Mountains of Tennessee. For hundreds of years, they lived quiet lives high in the mountains. The Cherokees hunted in the woods and fished in the streams.

³ When white people settled the land, Cherokee life changed. To try to save what land was left, the Cherokees began to live as

the settlers did. Like their white neighbors, they became farmers.

⁴ In 1828, gold was found in the Smokies. The discovery brought heartbreak to the Cherokee Nation. White men wanted the gold. To get it, they wanted the Cherokees to move away. The settlers also wanted the Cherokee land for farming. They hoped to set up their own farms with fields these Native Americans had cleared.

⁵ In 1830, the United States government stepped in—to side with the settlers! The government said that the Cherokees would have to relocate. They would have to move west to Oklahoma Territory and set up new farms there.

⁶ The Cherokees did not want to move away. The Smokies had always been their home. The Cherokees asked President Andrew Jackson to help them, but he said no.

Troops Arrive

⁷ In 1838, United States troops came to the Smokies. They began to round up the Cherokees. Only 1,000 Cherokee people got away. They hid deep in the mountains. The rest of the Cherokees were caught.

⁸ Soldiers dragged men from their fields. They pulled women and children from their homes. The troops showed no kindness to the

frightened Cherokees. The soldiers shouted at them in English. It was a language many Cherokees did not understand.

9 Soldiers forced the Cherokees into stockades and split up their families. Some children wound up in camps far from their parents. The soldiers did not care. They had orders to move the Cherokee people.

A Long, Hard March

10 When the camps were filled, the long march began. Armed soldiers put the Cherokees into 17 large groups and pushed them west. About 15,000 Cherokees set out.

11 The march was grim from the start. The Cherokees were herded onward like cattle. Some were shoved into wagons. A few rode on horses. Most of the people had to walk. They did not have enough blankets or warm clothes. Many did not even have shoes.

12 Children cried as they waved good-bye to their mountain homes. Men and women also cried. As one Cherokee said, "... all look[ed] sad like when friends die."

13 Oklahoma was a thousand miles away. To get there, the Cherokees had to tramp through mud and dust. They slogged through rain, sleet, and snow. John Burnett was a soldier on the march. He later wrote about that time. "The

sufferings of the Cherokee[s] were awful," he said. "The trail of the exiles was a trail of death. They had to sleep in the wagons and on the grounds without fire. And I have known as many as 22 of them to die in one night. ..."

Death on the Trail

14 Some people died from the cold. They shivered and shook but could not get warm. At last, their bodies ran out of heat. Others, too tired to keep going, died from exhaustion [leg•zaus'•chun]. Still others died from disease; they were too weak to fight off sickness.

15 Hunger was always a problem. The marchers had only the food they could carry with them. Their grain sacks got wet and were soon filled with bugs. No one had enough to eat. They all grew weak. Many Cherokees starved to death.

Cruel Treatment

16 The soldiers saw the pain and death they were causing. Yet they kept the groups of Cherokees moving anyway. It was hard for old people to keep up the pace. The heartless soldiers whipped them to make them move faster.

17 Mothers with young children struggled along. Burnett told of one woman with three small children. She set out "... with a baby

strapped on her back and leading a child with each hand." As Burnett told it, "the task was too great for that frail mother. . . . She sank and died with her baby on her back and her other two children clinging to her hands."

18 There was no time to give the dead funerals or burial. The soldiers forced the groups to keep moving. Bodies of the dead were thrown into ditches dug along the trail.

19 After about six months, the march ended. The Cherokees had reached Oklahoma. By then, 4,000 people had died. More than one-fourth of those who set out died on the Trail of Tears.

A Different Life

20 The Cherokees looked at their new land. It was not at all like their old home. The land was flat, dry, and hot. The Cherokees had to start new lives. But they never forgot the horrors of the long march. They named it the "Trail Where We Cried." Today it is called the Trail of Tears. The trail still marks a sad chapter in United States history.

Questions

1. Where was the Cherokees' original home?
2. Who was the president at the time of the march?
3. What problems did the Cherokees face during the march?
4. What happened to the marchers who died on the way to Oklahoma?
5. About how long did it take the Cherokees to march to Oklahoma?

Recognizing Stated Concepts

1. How did the discovery of gold in the Smoky Mountains affect the Cherokees?
2. How did the United States government settle the dispute between the settlers and the Cherokees?
3. Why was hunger always a problem on the march?